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Our last land frontiers

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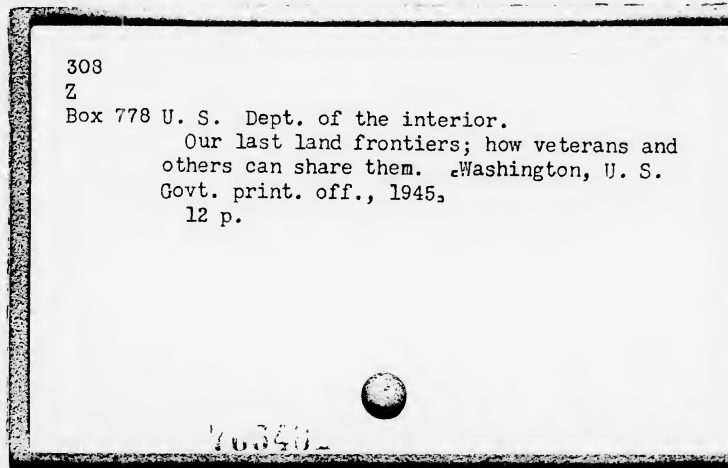
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OUR LAST LAND FRONTIERS

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*How Veterans
and Others can
Share Them*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

“OBTAINING PUBLIC LAND on which to establish a home is no longer the simple process that it used to be. No longer can a man go out and select a piece of public land, stake out a claim and settle down without further ado. There are now definite legal procedures governing the disposal of public land. While these legal formalities may seem to constitute formidable obstacles, they are likewise a great protection once they have been complied with. To be safeguarded against possible loss of title through the unscrupulous acts of others, as has happened all too often in the past, is worth the trouble that it may take to conform to all legal requirements in advance.”

OUR LAST LAND FRONTIERS

How Veterans and Others Can Share Them

AFTER EVERY WAR in which the United States has engaged there has been a strong upsurge of interest by veterans to acquire public lands. The period following this conflict will be no exception, according to all present indications.

Homesteading has always been a strong American tradition. The pioneer spirit that so characterized the early settlement of this country still persists. It has always manifested itself anew as men returning from the wars dream of establishing homes on the land where they can renew their spirit and forget about the turmoil of conflict.

While homesteading as it was understood in bygone years, particularly following the Civil War, is largely a thing of the past in the continental United States, it is still possible, within certain limits, to establish homes on public lands. This is especially true with respect to Alaska, the last big American land frontier.

Veterans who desire to settle on public land, either in the continental United States or Alaska, will avoid many heartbreaking disappointments if they first fully inform themselves concerning all of the possible pitfalls.

Obtaining public land on which to establish a home is no longer the simple process that it used to be. No longer can a man go out and select a piece of public land, stake out a claim and settle down without further ado. There are now definite legal procedures governing the disposal of public land. While these legal formalities may seem to constitute formidable obstacles, they are likewise a great protection once they have been complied with. To be safeguarded against possible loss of title through the unscrupulous acts of others, as has happened all too often in the past, is worth the trouble that it may take to conform to all legal requirements in advance.

The Department of the Interior, since its creation nearly a century ago, has been the chief custodian of the natural resources, including land, that belong to the people of the United States. Its general policy

is the judicious development of these resources, consistent with true conservation, in the best interests of those who acquire public lands for settlement and of the public generally.

The Department stands ready to assist any qualified citizen in establishing a home on public lands that are available and suitable for that purpose. Various bureaus of the Department are engaged in the different phases of this work and are in a position to furnish detailed information along their specialized lines.

This pamphlet does not attempt to furnish all of the answers to public land questions, since they are many and somewhat complicated. The purpose is to outline briefly what the possibilities for settling on public land are, and to direct those who may be interested to the sources where complete and official information may be obtained.

Advantages to Veterans

One of the prime requisites for obtaining title to public land is 3 years' actual residence beginning within 6 months after permission to enter has been granted. There are numerous other requirements concerning such subjects as the building of a habitable dwelling, the cultivation of the land and other details, about which prospective settlers would do well to inform themselves before filing an application.

The principal advantage that veterans have over other citizens is that service in the armed forces, up to a maximum of 2 years, is credited toward the 3-year residence requirement. This applies generally to all citizens over 21 years of age who have served at least 90 days in the armed forces and who have been honorably discharged. Veterans also enjoy a 90-day priority in filing applications for settlement on public land classified for that purpose. Any veteran of World War II under 21 is entitled to the same rights under the homestead laws as those over 21 who may be veterans of this or other conflicts. Residence requirements of such minors will be suspended until 6 months after their discharge from the service.

Moreover, homestead claims of veterans of World War II, initiated before their entrance into the service, are protected against forfeiture during the period of their service and for 6 months thereafter. Such veterans who are honorably discharged and because of physical incapacity due to their service

are unable to return to the land, may make proof without further residence, improvements, and cultivation.

Further information regarding details of veterans' rights, as well as other qualifications, will be furnished upon request by the General Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C.

Public Lands in Alaska

By far the greatest opportunities for obtaining title to and establishing homesteads on public lands lie in Alaska. This Territory covers an area of 586,400 square miles, roughly equal to one-fifth of that of the United States. More than 90 percent of the Territory is under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. The major portion is still open to settlement under the homestead laws.

But, while the opportunities in Alaska are undoubtedly vast, there are many difficulties to be overcome. Considerable progress has been made in developing the Territory on a stable basis, but it is still no place for the faint-hearted. Those with sufficient financial backing and with courage and tenacity may reasonably count upon success in the long run, but without these essentials veterans and others would be wise to look twice before they leap. Much also depends upon the wise selection of land, as to quality and accessibility.

Many misconceptions about Alaska have been dispipated as a result of the war. Many who have seen service there have been fascinated by its picturesqueness and impressed by its obvious possibilities. The Territory has largely lived down its old and undeserved reputation as "Seward's ice-box"—a reputation that was pinned on it by the critics of Secretary of State Seward who negotiated the Territory's purchase from Russia in 1867.

To speak of the climate of Alaska is as misleading as to speak of the climate of Europe, or of Asia. The climate varies widely from that of southeastern Alaska, where it is virtually as mild as, but much wetter than, that of Virginia, to that of the frozen wastes of the Arctic Circle and the fogs and williwaws of the Aleutian Islands.

Only about 2,321,000 of Alaska's 365,841,000 acres have been surveyed. All unappropriated and unreserved public land in Alaska, not mineral or saline in character, adaptable to any agricultural use not occupied for the purpose of trade or business and not within the limits of an incorporated city or

town is subject to homestead settlement. The amount of first-class land suitable for profitable farming is, however, comparatively limited.

In general, the laws governing homesteading in the United States also apply to Alaska. Settlement may be made on either surveyed or unsurveyed land, but if on unsurveyed land the prospective settler must make rough surveys of the land that he proposes to settle. Such surveys must be made in accordance with certain rules laid down by the General Land Office. Information concerning the ownership status of land may be obtained from any of the three District Land Offices in Alaska, located at Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Nome.

Veterans have the same preference accorded to them by the homestead laws of the United States. In addition, where lands are newly opened or restored to homestead entry veterans will be granted a preference right of application for a period of 90 days before the lands become subject to application by the general public.

In addition to homesteading in Alaska, on sites limited to 160 acres, any adult citizen of the United States, whose employer is engaged in trade, manufacturing, or other productive industry in Alaska, or who is himself engaged in such business, may purchase one claim, not exceeding 5 acres, of non-mineral land at \$2.50 an acre, but for not less than a minimum of \$10. An applicant for such a tract is required to pay the cost of the survey.

Any citizen of the United States after occupying land in Alaska as a homestead or headquarters in a habitable house not less than 5 months each year for 3 years may purchase such tract, not exceeding 5 acres, if nonmineral in character, at \$2.50 an acre, but for not less than a minimum of \$10. Such an applicant is not required to pay the cost of the survey.

Fur Farming in Alaska

Fur farming has been carried on in the Territory for a sufficiently long period to demonstrate that the raising of such fur animals as minks and blue foxes is profitable. This is especially true in southeastern Alaska and along the general coast line where fish, a basic fur animal food, may be procured cheaply.

Certain areas of Alaska are admirably adapted to the production of fur of good quality, and there is plenty of room for expanding this industry. There

are hundreds of licensed fur farmers in Alaska, the majority of whom are raising minks and blue foxes, although some silver foxes are raised in captivity.

Full information on the possibilities of fur farming in Alaska will be furnished upon request by the Director of the Experimental Fur Station, Petersburg, Alaska. Inquiries regarding the leasing of land for fur farming purposes should be addressed to the General Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C.

Mining in Alaska

Mineral resources are known to be large and varied, and there are undoubtedly large and rich mineral areas still unexplored. Notable evidence of this has been disclosed by extensive searches for war-needed metals and minerals by the Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines. Postwar prospecting for minerals will be greatly facilitated by new strategic maps, particularly of the northern half of the Territory, that have been made for military purposes from aerial photographs by the Geological Survey in cooperation with the Army Air Forces. These maps will be available to the general public after the war.

While good results in mining operations may reasonably be expected, the hazards for the individual prospector without ample financial backing are considered relatively great, since successful mining has become largely a matter for large-scale, scientific operations by well-equipped companies. Of course, there is nothing to prevent intelligent individual prospectors from attempting to make important discoveries, which, if successful, can be easily and profitably disposed of to large enterprises for exploitation.

A large part of the Territory's natural mineral wealth consists of gold, silver, mercury, antimony, tin, coal, copper, iron, lead, and platinum. There also may be considerable oil reserves in some parts of the country, but to what extent remains largely to be seen. Transportation is, of course, a problem.

For regulations covering acquisition of mining claims and mineral leases, inquiries should be addressed to the General Land Office, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C. For statistical data on the production, consumption and use of minerals in Alaska write to the Bureau of Mines, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C.

Business Opportunities

Since Alaska, a natural scenic wonderland and sport fisherman's paradise, is expected to grow in importance as a vacation land and as a goal for tourists, there will undoubtedly be great opportunities for veterans and others who desire to go into businesses catering to the tourist trade. Tourist facilities are comparatively meager, especially in many picturesque localities off of the beaten path.

However, here again, those contemplating the establishment of such businesses should do so with their eyes open. It must be remembered that in many places in Alaska the tourist season is short, and that the permanent population of the Territory is normally less than 100,000 persons, or about one-eighth of the number of persons living in Washington, D. C.

Current and reliable information on such businesses can probably be obtained by writing to the local Chambers of Commerce in the larger Alaskan towns. It is also possible to obtain reliable information from the newly created Alaska Development Commission, Juneau. Moreover, it would also be advisable personally to look into actual conditions on the ground before making too heavy commitments.

As a general rule, it may be said that settlement on public land in Alaska is encouraged but not urged. Those who choose Alaska as their future homes should do so with caution. There is little doubt that ultimately Alaska is destined to become an important crossroads at the top of the world. It is a natural way station on air lines to Asia and Eastern Europe.

But Alaska itself, as well as those who settle there, will be better off if it has an orderly and stable development. It is hoped, for the benefit of all concerned, that sudden rushes of hordes of people with get-rich-quick ideas but with no sustained interest in healthy growth, may be avoided.

For those genuinely interested in pulling up stakes and making Alaska their permanent home the Department of the Interior stands ready to offer all of the information and assistance at its command. Information concerning the general aspects of life in the Territory can be obtained from the Division of Territories and Island Possessions, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C.

Irrigated Land in Western U. S.

Within a reasonably short time after the war, opportunities for establishing farm homes on existing projects and newly irrigated land in western United States will open up as the Congress provides the funds. Projects already authorized would provide approximately 80,000 new farms averaging 70 acres each on potentially fertile but now arid soil, plus 20,000 new farms that will come into being in irrigated areas which have been faced with inadequate water.

The Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior, which has charge of developing the water and land resources of the West, has presented to the Congress an inventory of 415 irrigation projects, including those authorized and those under study. Altogether, these projects would create 154,700 new farms, in addition to 38,600 farms that would be made possible on land which now has to be cultivated in large uneconomic units because of inadequate water. This would bring the total of new farms to 193,300 extending over an area of 21,426,000 acres—more than three times the size of the State of Maryland.

Those who wish to establish themselves on this land, however, will have to exercise some patience. Work on most of the authorized projects was halted during the war because of manpower and materials limitations. Construction can be resumed and carried forward swiftly as soon as war conditions permit removal of these restrictions. Obviously, all of the projects will not be opened up at one time.

Some of the newly irrigated land will be on the public domain, but most of it will not be. Under the Columbia Basin Project Act of 1943, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to purchase arid land in the Columbia Basin project in the State of Washington for resale to settlers when that development is under irrigation. The extent of the land to be purchased depends on congressional appropriations. The reclamation law sets the maximum size of farms which may receive irrigation water from a reclamation project at 160 irrigable acres.

Disposal of newly irrigated land that is part of the public domain is governed by the homestead laws. Homesteading on such land requires the same qualifications as on any other public lands, with certain important additions. Applicants for farms on irrigated public land must have a minimum of

\$2,000 in cash or livestock and farm equipment, or equivalent assets, sufficient to develop the farm. They must also show that they are in good health and have had at least 2 years' experience in farming, preferably in irrigated agriculture.

Veterans' Preference

Loans to veterans guaranteed under the GI Bill of Rights may be used for acquiring equipment and for other necessary capital expenses in establishing a farm on irrigated projects. As each project is opened up on the public domain, veterans have 90 days in which to file applications, and these will be acted upon before applications from non-veterans will be considered.

The same 90-day advantage to veterans on other land which may be acquired by the Secretary of the Interior is provided in a bill (H. R. 520) recently introduced in Congress. Passage of this bill would mean that as Reclamation projects are completed over the next 20 years, applications of veterans to acquire farms will have preference during the first 90 days.

Western Land Only

All irrigation projects of the Bureau of Reclamation are located in 17 Western States, as follows: Oregon, Washington, California, New Mexico, Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Texas.

One of the largest developments will be in the Columbia Basin project where approximately 1,000,000 acres of productive soil will be brought under irrigation. While the construction of that project is planned over a 10-year period, it is anticipated that at least 400,000 acres will be ready for settlement within 4 to 5 years after the close of the war.

One important thing to remember is that if you are interested in these irrigated farms, and believe that you can qualify under the homestead and reclamation laws, you should write immediately to the Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C., for complete information. You should ask to be put on the list of those to receive notification when a project in which you may be interested will be ready for settlement. In this way you can keep fully informed, so that, if you are a veteran, you can take full advantage

of the 90-day preference to which you are entitled by law.

Other Public Lands

As of June 30, 1944, the remaining public lands—exclusive of areas acquired through purchase by the Government for resettlement, submarginal land administration, military, or other purposes—consisted of 37,567,096 acres outside of grazing districts, 130,669,351 acres within grazing districts, or a total of 168,236,447 acres. While this land is scattered throughout 25 States, the great bulk of it is situated in desert, semidesert, upland or mountainous areas of the West.

Therefore, with few exceptions, this land is not considered suitable for homestead or settlement use.

It is well to remember that all of the States of the Union do not contain public domain. Those which do not are: Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. Information concerning the acquisition of public land in these States should be sought from the appropriate State authorities.

Small areas of public domain in widely scattered areas still remain in the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. *Since there are no district land offices in these States, all business regarding the disposal of public land within their borders is transacted by the General Land Office, Washington 25, D. C.*

No public lands remain undisposed of in the States of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, or Ohio.

The General Land Office maintains 22 district offices in the remaining 13 Western States, located as follows:

ARIZONA, Phoenix; CALIFORNIA, Los Angeles and Sacramento; COLORADO, Denver and Pueblo; IDAHO, Coeur d'Alene and Blackfoot; MONTANA, Great Falls and Billings; NEVADA, Carson City; NEW MEXICO, Santa Fe and Las Cruces; NORTH DAKOTA, Bismarck; OREGON, Roseburg, Lakeview, and The Dalles; SOUTH DAKOTA, Pierre; UTAH, Salt Lake City; WASHINGTON, Spokane; WYOMING, Cheyenne, Buffalo, and Evanston. Inquiries may be directed to the District Land Office

at any of these localities, or to the General Land Office, Washington 25, D. C.

Important Qualifications

For your general guidance these four points should be borne in mind:

1. There is no general map or catalogue of the public domain of the United States from which the location of any specified type of land may be ascertained. No maps of the States and counties showing the sites of the vacant public land can be furnished. Each District Land Office keeps records of the public land within its jurisdiction and the public is at liberty to examine these records at these offices. However, the records do not indicate the kind of land in the areas, but only its status as to ownership. *Consult the Register about the purchase of township diagrams or other details relating to the status of the lands.*

2. In general, no portion of the public lands in the continental United States can be acquired until it has first been classified by the Government as best suited for the use to which it is intended to be put. Petition for such classification must be submitted at the time the application is made for the land.

3. It is not possible to secure public land of the United States on an "order by mail, sight unseen" basis, because each application must be accompanied by a sworn statement that the applicant has inspected the land sought and is personally familiar with its characteristics.

4. Contrary to a fairly widespread impression, no public lands have been specifically set aside for veterans.

Leasing of Small Sites

There is an abundance of public land, particularly in desert and mountainous areas of the West, which is not suitable for homesteading but which is ideal for home, cabin, camp, health, convalescent, recreational or business purposes. While it is not possible to obtain title to this land, it can be leased for these specified purposes in sites not exceeding 5 acres each, under authority granted by Congress in 1938.

Small sites leased under this authority, in general, are not intended to be self-supporting. Applicants for such leases must satisfy the Government that they are financially responsible and that they

will conform to certain other rules affecting the public interest.

Kinds of 5-Acre Sites

Seven types of 5-acre sites are available for lease:

1. Home sites, suitable for a permanent, year-round residence for a single person or a family;

2. Cabin sites for a summer, week-end, or vacation residence;

3. Camp sites for temporary camping and for the erection of simple or temporary structures and shelters, such as tents, tent platforms, etc.;

4. Health sites for the temporary or permanent residence of a single person or of a family for the prevention or cure of disease or illness;

5. Convalescent sites for the residence of a single person or family to recuperate from a disease or illness;

6. Recreational sites, chiefly suitable for non-commercial outdoor recreation; and

7. Business sites for some form of small commercial enterprise.

Qualifications for obtaining such leases, the cost and duration of which are fixed by the Secretary of the Interior, are, with some exceptions, much the same as those governing the disposal of public land for homesteading.

Detailed information concerning procedures in obtaining such leases will be furnished upon request by the General Land Office, Washington 25, D. C., or by any of the 22 District Land Offices here listed.

Land in Grazing Districts

The Grazing Service of the Department of the Interior administers, under the Taylor Grazing Act, approximately 142,000,000 acres of land in 10 Western States. Included in this area are the 130,669,351 acres of public land mentioned at the beginning of this pamphlet. The rest consists of grazing lands leased for grazing purposes from the States concerned or from other owners.

While the homestead laws apply to all public lands within the grazing districts, homesteading for farming or other purposes on such land is possible, under the Taylor Grazing Act, only after it has been classified as being better suited for other than grazing purposes. *Applications for such classification, after personal examination of the land proposed to be classified, must be made to the General Land Office, Washington 25, D. C.*

Generally speaking, the public land within grazing districts is not considered suitable for homesteading purposes. If it had been, it would have been taken up long ago. But if an applicant can prove to the satisfaction of the General Land Office and to the Secretary of the Interior that homesteading is profitable on a given 160-acre parcel of land within a grazing district, it can be classified and opened for homesteading. In such cases, veterans enjoy the same preference as on any other public land.

Of course, it is possible for veterans to enter the livestock business and to have access to the Federal range, along with the other 22,000 licensees or permittees who are now using it. But this is purely a business proposition, in which there is no preference accorded to veterans. While all of the Federal range is now in full use, it is often possible to purchase from an established operator ranch property that carries with it the privilege to graze the Federal range under the terms of the Taylor Grazing Act.

Before embarking on such a business, however, it is important to consult the Grazing Service beforehand, as to the availability of grazing areas, in order to avoid hasty or uninformed action that might spell disaster.

There are numerous requirements for eligibility to graze cattle or sheep on the Federal range. One of the most important is that proof must be furnished that the owner of the livestock has adequate facilities outside of the grazing areas for caring for his herds or flocks during the seasons when the range is not open. The average period when grazing lands may be used is 4 months of the year, although in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of some of the adjoining States, the grazing season may be year-round. In most areas livestock owners, therefore, must make other provisions for feeding and caring for their animals during the rest of the year.

Seventy percent of those using the Federal grazing range own not more than 60 head of cattle, or the equivalent in sheep, calculated at the ratio of five sheep to one head of cattle.

Full information concerning the possibilities of the use of any grazing land for growing livestock, will be furnished freely by the Grazing Service. Its national headquarters are at Salt Lake City, Utah. It also maintains nine regional offices as follows: Phoenix, Ariz.; Reno, Nev. (which also administers grazing lands in California); Grand Junction, Colo.; Boise, Idaho; Burns, Oreg.; Billings, Mont.; Albuquerque, N. Mex., and Rawlins, Wyo.

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